

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
Legislation Committee

## **Inquiry into the Workplace Relations Amendment (WorkChoices) Bill 2005**

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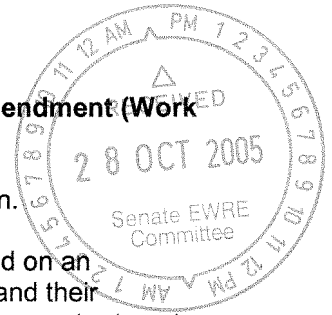
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**To the members of the Senate inquiry into the Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Bill, 2005**



I wish to express my opposition to the proposed industrial relations legislation.

My main concern is that the principle behind the proposed legislation is based on an expectation that a power balance now exists between individual employees and their employers. It could be argued that this may exist whilst we have low unemployment rates at present; but when the economy cyclically slumps as it will inevitably do, there will be a massive power imbalance, and employees will be unprotected. However, in all economic conditions, there will be those who will not have the skills, confidence, maturity or experience to be able to successfully negotiate an individual workplace agreement. This will be especially so since most employers will hire skilled people to specifically negotiate on their behalf, an option not affordable to most individuals.

The industrial relations laws were originally developed for a very good reason - to offset the power imbalance between labour and capital. Certainly, there may be opportunities to review the existing laws, but such a radical change as that proposed in the legislation is not justified.

New Zealand tried this approach and has now rejected it since it led to reduced wages and poorer conditions.

We in Australia are, on average, amongst the wealthiest people in the world with real incomes tripling since 1950. Granted, there are still those in need of help and perhaps income redistribution is necessary, but overall we do not need more disposable income. The myth of the 'middleclass battler' is just that...a myth designed to play on the sensitive hip pocket nerve. Instead we should be focussing on improving our lives and community, not our material acquisitions.

The economy should be a tool to help us lead fulfilling, healthy, happy lives. But we measure economic activity in fiscal terms only, not measures of wellbeing or sustainability.

When the 'Gross National Product' measure of economic activity was developed during World War 2 in Great Britain, its creator warned that it should only be a short term measure to help England through the war by focussing activity on the production for war effort. He warned that this would happen at the expense of community wellbeing and environmental health. But this simplistic measure of economic activity remains and now guides our policy.

We now seem to have become slaves to the economy, sacrificing our need for healthy community and family to a perceived need for a flexible labour market. Why are employee stress levels increasing and people feeling they have to work longer unpaid hours? Is this the utopian ideal we aimed for? or have we allowed the economy to become our master rather than our servant?

In the interests of a better, fairer Australia, please reject the proposed laws